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PP RUEHDBU
DE RUEHEK #1783 3530957
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 190957Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8740
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1874
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY 1453
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2286
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1671
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BISHKEK 001783

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SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PRESIDENT ON LIVE TV: REVOKE IMMUNITY FOR
U.S. SOLDIERS

REF: BISHKEK 1772

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARIE L. YOVANOVITCH, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Responding to a question during a live call-in show on national television December 18, President Bakiyev said that the diplomatic status accorded U.S. soldiers at the Manas Air Base should be revoked. Referring to the December 6 security incident at Manas Air Base in which a U.S. serviceman shot and killed a Kyrgyz citizen, Bakiyev said that if American soldiers harm Kyrgyz citizens, they should be held accountable under Kyrgyz law. Bakiyev said he regretted that the 2001 base agreement gave such "extensive" rights to U.S. military personnel, and he said he had directed the MFA to review the base agreement and to recommend changes that would annul immunities for U.S. military personnel stationed in Kyrgyzstan. (Note: Then-Prime Minister Bakiyev played an important role in negotiating the original base agreement in ¶2001. End note.)

BAKIYEV, PARLIAMENT QUESTION CONTINUED NEED FOR BASE

¶2. (C) President Bakiyev also questioned the need for maintaining the U.S. air base in Kyrgyzstan, stating that conditions had improved in Afghanistan and that today "there is no war like what was going on in 2001-2002." In addition to the President's comments, Parliament passed a resolution on December 15 calling for a review of the "appropriateness of further deployments" at the base. The resolution also called on the government to revise the terms of the base agreement concerning the status of troops. Parliamentarians also accused base officials of hindering efforts by Kyrgyz authorities to investigate the December 6 shooting incident. Bakiyev too felt that the inquiry was "proceeding with difficulties".

"THIS IS NOT IRAQ"

¶3. (C) The December 6 shooting incident continues to receive wide-scale, negative coverage from the Kyrgyz press.

Newspapers, television, and blogs have been filled with reports and editorials about the incident. An article in the December 19 Slovo Kyrgyzstana, a government-owned newspaper, was headlined "This is Not Iraq." The article conveyed the concerns of parliament about the December 6 shooting, as well as previous incidents involving U.S. military aircraft and soldiers, and asks whether it is time for U.S. soldiers to leave Kyrgyzstan. Many articles have contained false information and wild speculation about the shooting, some of which were rebutted in the more independent news agency reports. Other articles have expressed concern about the safety of base operations, and have dug up reports of previous accidents connected to the base. Some media outlets have given the USG a voice by publishing press releases expressing the perspective of the embassy and the U.S. military.

14. (C) Initial press coverage of the Embassy's December 18 delivery of responses to diplomatic notes regarding the case has also been largely negative. Media has not focused on the fact that the U.S. responded positively to many of the Kyrgyz government requests. Instead, press reports stress that U.S. refused to waive the diplomatic status of U.S. troops.

YOVANOVITCH